

# **Wreck of the Indian: The Search for the Story Part I**

**Tuesday, June 17, 2003**

e-mail from:

Dave Riggins, President  
IITR Truck Driving Schools, Inc  
Clackamas, OR

I was on a 160 vessel, the Indian owned by Schenk Seafood's (spelling may be incorrect) out of Bellingham Washington that sank in either August, or Sept of 1977 when we ran aground at Egg Island. Do you know how I can find any info on this sinking?

**Tuesday, June 17, 2003**

e-mail reply from:

Mike Burwell  
USDOI, Minerals Management Service

Hi Dave:

I take it your boat was the fairly famous 405 ton M/V *Indian* operated by the Puget Sound Freight Lines for many years, built in Portland in 1931? I found some pictures of the vessel during its earlier service and a number of mentions of it in H.W. McCurdy's *Marine History of the Pacific Northwest*. BUT, I didn't find anything in my newspaper files or database about the sinking in Aug/Sept 1977.

I take it the Egg Island you mean is the one off the mouth of the Copper River Delta. There are also Egg Islands in Bristol Bay, off Kodiak, in Prince William Sound, and a couple near the south end of Prince of Wales Island. Do you think the incident made the local Alaska papers? The Seattle papers? I get pretty interested when I don't have a wreck incident in my master database. Let me know if there are any more details (other crewmen, the captain, details of the rescue, etc.) Sometimes the slightest detail will be just the clue I need to find more info. My first step will be to recheck the Alaska newspapers for Aug and Sept of 1977.

**Tuesday, June 17, 2003**

e-mail from:

Dave Riggins

I remember the name Shellcoff Straights was somewhere between Kodiak and the mainline. I also think the boat was insured by Lloyds of London. When we sank it, we were following another boat owned by the same company. I think it

was around 120' long and was named the scout. The Indian was pulling a 50' Yukon tender boat with no keel for sand bars and that is how we escaped. It was quite the ordeal. I was 18 at the time.

I know the owners were George and Leroy Schenk from Bellingham and I found numbers for one of those names.

George Schenk, 360 733-7376 in Bellingham. One of their sons was on the ship maybe not when it sank and his name was Keith. I found a Keith in Burlington, I don't know where that is though. 360 757-1371.

I remember that we didn't duck the storm like we should have at Kodiak because there was some trouble with licensed skippers, first mates, or engineers. I don't remember the particulars.

I really appreciate anything you can find out on this as I think it would be cool to see what happened to all those who were on board.

Thanks.

Dave

**Wednesday, June 18, 2003**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell, Minerals Management Service

Dave: I attached a table I made about the boat from info from the Merchant Vessel volumes. It's interesting that it was renamed the Fairweather in 1974 and then renamed back to the Indian in 1977. It's also interesting that it didn't pass out of registration until after 1981....I'll be checking the AK papers.....Mike





**Wednesday, June 18, 2003**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell, Minerals Management Service

Hi Dave:

I just went through the *Kodiak Mirror*, the local Kodiak paper, for Aug, Sept, Oct, and Nov of 1977 and found a few incidents I didn't have, but I didn't find anything on the *Indian*, the *Scout*, or the tender. I wonder if we have the right year?

--Mike

**Wednesday, June 18, 2003**

e-mail from:

Dave Riggins

Without question it was 1977. I know because that was the year I graduated, and Elvis died when I was on the Yukon.

**Thursday, June 19, 2003**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell, Minerals Management Service

You're right, I saw the headlines in 1977 about Elvis.....

So I take it the three vessels left Bellingham in August 1977 and proceeded across the Gulf of Alaska towards Kodiak. Then, you traveled through Shelikof Strait on your way to the mouth of the Yukon River. In Shelikof Strait, the Indian sank and you escaped to the tender. Then, I'm assuming the Scout got a line on the tender and saved you guys....Did you stop at Dutch Harbor, at St. Michael? I'm just trying to get a handle on where to look for more information. The Bellingham papers might have something, and I'll check to see if there was a Dutch Harbor paper publishing then....Also, did the Coast Guard rescue you? Have you called the Schenks?

**Friday, June 20, 2003**

e-mail from:

Dave Riggins

We sailed from Bellingham in May, stopped and fueled in Ketchikan then again in Dutch Harbor then spent 3 months on the Yukon. We were headed home with 3/4 million pounds of frozen salmon when we sank. I'm not exactly sure the scout was saved. I recall someone telling me so. We all escaped to the Cowboy but it was tied to the Indian and the Coast Guard sent out a helicopter to drop us bolt cutters so we could free ourselves from the Indian. They had never heard of these boats so when we first called May Day, they sent out a plane to see if was

for real and then sent the chopper. We somehow managed to motor around for a day or so and ended up in Cordova. I flew home from there.

I just noticed you live in Anchorage. I'm meeting a friend from Fairbanks on the 19th of July to go Salmon and Halibut fishing in Homer and Kenai.

I think I will attempt to contact the Schenks today. I just remembered I think the CG was dispatched from Kodiak Island if that helps.

**Friday, June 20, 2003**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell

Dave:

The **Cowboy** was the key; it came up in my database, and I found this in my newspaper files for 1981!

**Anchorage Times, [Saturday] Aug. 22. 1981:**

"...the Coast Guard evacuated three people from the fishing vessel **Cowboy** and the barge **Fort Yukon** Thursday [Aug 20, 1981] night after they encountered rough weather in the Gulf of Alaska. Coast Guard Chief Ray Massey said the barge and the fishing boat were under tow by the tug **Scout** about 60 miles southeast of Yakutat when the Coast Guard got a report that the boat was taking on water and encountering rough seas. A Coast Guard helicopter from the Sitka Air Station was sent to the scene, and evacuated three people."

**Anchorage Daily News, [Saturday] Aug. 22, 1981:**

"Stormy seas also plagued seamen in Southeast Alaska Thursday [Aug. 20] and Friday [Aug. 21] as Coast Guardsmen evacuated a 67-year-old diabetic patient from Metlakatla to Ketchikan and sent a helicopter and cutter to assist a tugboat pulling a barge and fishing vessel near Yakutat...Stormy seas further to the north, near Yakutat, prompted a tugboat skipper's ham radio call to his wife in Seattle Thursday—and through his wife, a call for help to the Coast Guard.

Chief Ray Massey reported from Juneau Friday the tug **Scout** was taking on water in rough seas 60 miles south of Yakutat. The tug was towing the barge **Fort Yukon** and the fishing vessel **Cowboy**.

After the man's wife called the Coast Guard, a helicopter dispatched from the Sitka air station evacuated three people from the **Cowboy** Thursday night, leaving one on board.

Massey said the three were evacuated.

Thursday night, Massey said, the **Cowboy** slipped its towline in an attempt to cut the drag on the tug and Friday was still attempting to reach Yakutat on its own.

The Coast Guard cutter Planetree, based in Juneau, was sent to assist the **Scout** and the barge. But late Friday, another Coast Guard spokesman said the **Cowboy** apparently became lost 10 miles southwest of Point Manby at the entrance to Yakutat Bay. The Planetree was then dispatched to aid the fishing vessel.

A Coast Guard spokesman in Juneau late Friday night said the Planetree was escorting all three vessels into Yakutat Bay.”

I can find out more now that I have hit on the date...I wonder why the **Indian** isn't mentioned?

Cheers,

Mike

**Saturday, June 21, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

Wow, what a coincidence. The reason I say so is the Cowboy we were pulling was not a fishing boat. We used it to go up and down the Yukon and buy fish from the Eskimos. It was called a tender. The Scout we had was a processor, so was the Indian. This was in 1981 and our incident was in 1977. The coastguard sent out a plane and a chopper but they rescued no one from either boat. I do not remember what happened to the crew on the Scout. Hopefully we can find this incident. The CG must have records of dispatching the plane and chopper doesn't it?

**Saturday, June 21, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

Is this your hobby or what you do as a job?

**Monday, June 23, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Dave:

I write environmental impact statements for the Feds, The Dept. of Interior, and also just happen to have gotten interested in Alaska marine history. My agency, Minerals Management Service, is now the keeper of the Alaska Shipwrecks Database, and I keep it up to date. Like I said earlier, I think, I get pretty

interested when something isn't in it because right now it's holding at 4,000 + records from 1741 to the present.....Mike

**Monday, June 23, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Dave: I left a message with Lt. Commander Diane Kalina at the Coast Guard Marine Safety Office here in Anchorage. She's out of town for a few days but she's a great source of information and has helped me out before and will probably come up with something....Mike

**Tuesday, June 24, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

I sure hope we find something. I can't believe it didn't get recorded somewhere. The more I think about this the more I recall and I believe the Indian was at one time a ferry boat. It was later converted into a freezer/processor. It seems like the Scout was an ex military boat of some kind. Many years ago to remember for me.

I really appreciate your interest in this. Dave...

**Tuesday, June 24, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Dave: I'm gone for a week. Will let you know what I find out from Diane Kalina when I return...Mike

**Tuesday, June 24, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

ok, have a good one...

**Monday, August 25, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Hi Dave:

I finally heard back from Diane Kalina at the Coast Guard. She says they have no information on file for the *Indian, Cowboy, Scout* incident in 1977. They don't keep info back that far. She suggested you contact the Coast Guard Historian Dr.

Robert Browning at 202-267-2596. She also suggested contacting the National Archives. I know Bruce Parham at the Archives here in Anchorage. You can reach him at 907-271-2443 or [bruce.parham@alaska.nara.gov](mailto:bruce.parham@alaska.nara.gov). If he thinks he has anything, I'd be happy to go downtown and run it down for you, make copies for myself and send it along to you. This is one of the more interesting shipwreck puzzles I've dealt with in a while, so I'd be happy to get some answers too.

I still think your best bet would be to call the Schenks.....Have you been able to reach them?

By the way, would you like copies of the historical information (including photos) that I found on the Indian?

Cheers, Mike

**Monday, August 25, 2003**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell

Dave: These are some files on the boats for your archives.

How was your fishing trip?

--Mike







**COWBOY Oil. s. Official # 573529**

<b>Owner</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Gr Tons</b>	<b>Net Tons</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Breadth</b>	<b>Depth</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Crew</b>	<b>HP</b>	<b>Built</b>	<b>Built Location</b>	<b>Home Port</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Schenk Seafood Sales, Inc., 17 Squalicum Fill, Bellingham, WA 98225</b>	<b>MV 1977</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>58.2</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>Fsh.</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>1976</b>	<b>Bellingham, WA</b>	<b>Bellingham, WA</b>	<b>Bellingham, WA</b>
<b>"</b>	<b>MV 1978</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>
<b>"</b>	<b>MV 1979</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>
<b>?</b>	<b>MV 1980</b>												
<b>Same as 1979</b>	<b>MV 1981</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>
<b>No Volumes Issued</b>	<b>MV 1982-1988</b>												
<b>Same as 1981</b>	<b>MV 1989</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>"</b>	<b>Seattle</b>	<b>?</b>



## **Schenk's Vessels**

**1979:**

Ft. Yukon

Scout

Indian

Cowboy

Muktuk

**1981:**

Almar  
Ft. Yukon  
Indian  
Scout  
Cowboy  
Muktuk

**1989:**

Almar  
Cowboy  
Drover  
Ft. Yukon  
Ranger  
Scout

From this list compiled from the Merchant Vessel volumes, it looks like the **Indian** survived the 1977 event, as did the **Scout** and the **Cowboy**. The **Indian** goes out of registration sometime between 1981 and 1989, but the **Cowboy**, **Scout** and the **Ft. Yukon** are still working vessels. The **Cowboy** is owned by Fields and Sons, Inc. in Kodiak, AK, the **Ft. Yukon** is owned by Inlet Fish Producers in Kenai, AK, and the **Scout** went out of documentation after 1998.

**Tuesday, September 2, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

I'll call the both and get back to you and yes, pictures would be terrific...

Thanks Mike...

**Tuesday, September 2, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

I'm not sure what to do to document the sinking of the Indian but I can assure you it was destroyed. We had 3/4 of a million pounds of frozen salmon on board and it as well as the entire boat was in the surf. I may call the Schenks and see what they say. I can't believe the CG doesn't have record when they send out a plane and a chopper.

Thanks for the help on this situation.

**Tuesday, September 2, 2003**

e-mail from:

Dave Riggins

Mike:

We may have sunk after Elvis died. I thought it was in late Late Aug or early Sept we sank. I'm sure it wasn't in July but I guess it would make sense to search July, Aug, and Sept.

This is really strange that nothing has been found since not only did the Indian sink, but the Scout was grounded and it was a 130' boat itself. Someone had to have towed it off Egg Island. Any other idea's?

Dave...

**Wednesday, September 3, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Hey Dave:

I found an article in the SEA CHEST, the journal of the Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society in Seattle, on the Puget Sound Freight Lines by Capt. Ed. Shields. On the Last page it says for the INDIAN: "Built Portland, Ore. Purchased 1937, sold 1971, **Lost in Alaska 1977.**" WOW. We made contact. So, like you, I really wonder why there is no mention in the local papers. I'll keep digging....

I'll send along this article and the other ones with the pictures..... Mike

**Thursday, September 4, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

Excellent, I knew I wasn't crazy...It was either August or Sept I'm sure but I think it was August.

Thanks for all your help on this..Dave...

**Tuesday, November 11, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Dave:  
The Indian is still Driving Me NUTS....

I Sent this to the Bellingham Public Library today 11/11/2003:

I maintain the Alaska Shipwrecks Database for the Dept. of Interior here in Anchorage (It's been online and will be again whenever we fix our server problems at [www.mms.gov/alaska/ref/ships/index.htm](http://www.mms.gov/alaska/ref/ships/index.htm)). I have had an e-mail from an ex-crewman of the fish processor INDIAN that ran aground and was lost on Egg Island, S of Kodiak Island in Aug/Sept 1977. It was towing the fish tender Cowboy and the crew of the Indian saved themselves by escaping to the Cowboy. Another processor the Scout (part of the same flotilla) went ashore at the same time but was later saved. The Cowboy managed to reach Cordova where the crew of the Indian flew home. Home was Bellingham. The Indian, Cowboy and Scout left Bellingham May 1977 for a season's fishing in Alaska. I have checked 10 Alaska newspapers and contacted the Coast Guard and can find no mention of the event. The only printed confirmation I can find is in a Sea Chest article by Ed. Shields that says nothing more than the Indian was lost in 1977. Today I called the past owner of the Indian, George Schenk, and his widow Roberta confirmed the event but couldn't remember the year. She did believe there was local newspaper coverage of the event. Is it possible for you to confirm if there were any local newspaper stories? If you can, then I can interlibrary loan the microfilm and do more in-depth research. I assume the paper to get through ILL would be, if you find any leads, the Bellingham Herald? What makes this a big deal for me is that it's the first time in compiling the database, that now has over 4,000 records, where I've found an event of this magnitude mentioned by someone that has literally no written trail.

Thanks for any assistance you can offer,

Michael Burwell

**Tuesday, November 11, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

George's brother and partners name is Leroy. He was younger and may be alive.

Thanks for all the work on this. Dave...

**Thursday, November 13, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Bellingham Library

We do not have anything in our clipping files about the event you describe, but clip files are very problematic!

If you are pretty sure of the Aug/Sept. dates in 1977, I would suggest that you request Bellingham Herald microfilm for those dates through your local library and then scan the film.

You mentioned an article by Ed Shields. If it is the same person, there is an Ed Shields who wrote a book (2001) called *Salt of the Sea: The Pacific Coast Cod Fishery and the Last Days of Sail*. The cover flap indicated that Mr. Shields lives in Poulsbo, Washington. I checked Ref USA database and find a listing for Ed Shields: 360-779-4649. You might try calling him.

Sorry we couldn't be of more assistance. Good luck with your research.

MZ  
Reference Librarian

**Tuesday, November 18, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

Dead end after dead end. What a continuous bummer.

Have you thought about contacting Leroy Schenk? George or Leroy had a son who fished with us that summer. I believe his name was Keith. I don't recall if he was on the *Indian* when it sank.

Another idea was I remember it was insured by Lloyds of London and a couple insurance people were there when we got to Cordova.

**Monday, December 8, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

OK Dave you're not crazy & Merry Christmas:

Today I found two *Cordova Times* articles--one from Sept. 15 and the other from Sept. 23--on the *Scout*, *Indian*, and *Cowboy* mishap. Seems like it occurred on Sept. 7, 1977. I'll send you the two articles. One has a picture of the *Cowboy* docked in Cordova and mentions the skipper Floyd Warbus...

Cheers,

Mike

Here's the summary I put in the database:

For the *Indian*:

After spending 3 months on the lower Yukon River, The 170' *Indian*, an ex-Washington State ferry towing the 65' riverboat tender *Cowboy*, and following the 130' freezer ship *Scout*, beached on Egg Island S of Cordova in rough seas and

heavy rain. The Cowboy managed to sever itself from the Indian's 500-ft tow chain after a helicopter from Kodiak dropped cable cutters. The shallow-draft Cowboy was able to come alongside the Indian without grounding, get the 9 men aboard, and take them to Cordova. Within hours, the pounding waves had opened up and gutted the Indian, and its entire \$2.5 million worth of salmon and gear were lost. The Indian became a landmark and a hazard to navigation on the Mousetrap.

For the *Scout*:

The 130' freezer ship Scout, beached on Egg Island S of Cordova in rough seas and heavy rain while leading the Indian, another freezer boat and the riverboat tender Cowboy that the Indian had in tow. The Indian grounded, as well, and broke up after its 9-man crew was taken off by the Cowboy. Nine days after grounding, the vessels Kushtika and Forty Mile from Cordova, the tugs Trojan from Whittier, and George S from Hoonah finally pulled the Scout free and saved its 300,000 lb salmon cargo. Earlier, Beaver pilot, Tom Madsen, managed to drop a 340-lb tow cable to the Scout's crew on a 15-ft by 10-ft area on the stern in 60 mph winds.

For the *Cowboy*:

The riverboat tender Cowboy escaped grounding after it managed to sever itself from the tow chain of the freezer ship Indian that had grounded in high seas and heavy rain on Egg Island. The Cowboy's crew managed to cut the Indian's 500-ft tow chain after a helicopter from Kodiak dropped cable cutters. It was able to pull alongside the Indian and rescue all 9 men aboard and take them safely to Cordova. Another freezer ship in the convoy, the Scout, also grounded on Egg Island but was later successfully pulled off.

P.S. I also sent the following e-mail to a friend in Cordova:

"I've been trying off and on for the last few months to track down the wreck of the freezer ship *Indian* (an ex-Washington State ferry) that I finally confirmed today had beached in the sands of Egg Island on the Mousetrap in the Copper River Delta, Sept 7, 1977.

The last thing the *Cordova Times* (9-23-1977) said was that it had "become a landmark on the Mousetrap and can't be moved. It is in a prime fishing area and is a potential hazard to boat traffic...The only way the *Indian* can be removed is if the Army Corps of Engineers declares the *Indian* a hazard to surface navigation and blows it off the sand...[and such an action] "by the Army engineers won't be taken unless Cordova fishermen encourage them to do so."

My questions are: (1) Where is the Mousetrap in relation to Egg Island? (2) Did Cordova fishermen ask the Corps to remove the Indian? and (3) Was it removed?"

**Monday, December 8, 2003**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell to Gabriel Scott

Hi Gabe:

I've been trying off and on for the last few months to track down the wreck of the freezer ship *Indian* (an ex-Washington State ferry) that I finally confirmed today had beached in the sands of Egg Island on the Mousetrap in the Copper River Delta, Sept 7, 1977.

The last thing the *Cordova Times* (9-23-1977) said was that it had "become a landmark on the Mousetrap and can't be moved. It is in a prime fishing area and is a potential hazard to boat traffic...The only way the *Indian* can be removed is if the Army Corps of Engineers declares the *Indian* a hazard to surface navigation and blows it off the sand...[and such an action] "by the Army engineers won't be taken unless Cordova fishermen encourage them to do so."

My questions are: (1) Where is the Mousetrap in relation to Egg Island? (2) Did Cordova fishermen ask the Corps to remove the Indian? and (3) Was it removed?

Thanks,

Mike

P.S. Here's a synopsis of the event: After spending 3 months on the lower Yukon River, The 170' *Indian*, an ex-Washington State ferry towing the 65' riverboat tender *Cowboy*, and following the 130' freezer ship *Scout*, beached on Egg Island S of Cordova in rough seas and heavy rain. The *Cowboy* managed to sever itself from the *Indian's* 500-ft tow chain after a helicopter from Kodiak dropped cable cutters. The shallow-draft *Cowboy* was able to come alongside the *Indian* without grounding, get the 9 men aboard, and take them to Cordova. Within hours, the pounding waves had opened up and gutted the *Indian*, and its entire \$2.5 million worth of salmon and gear were lost. The *Indian* became a landmark and a hazard to navigation on the Mousetrap.

**Wednesday, December 10, 2003**

e-mail from:

Dave Riggins

Mike:

I also be interested in your friends responses to the 3 questions you asked. I'm curious to know if the *Indian* hull is still there at all and if so, it would be cool to get a pic. Thanks again...

**Friday, December 12, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Gabriel Scott

I'm asking around, but no luck yet. Surely some fishermen knows, but lots of people out of town. I'll let you know.

Also found a great account of the Portland wreck in the Cordova Daily Alaskan, from the skipper and passengers just after it happened. Could fax it to you, or send it if you like. What's your fax or address? Matches up perfectly with where the wreck is now. Aground at the mouth of the river, broad to the waves got broken up and washed ashore. 10 ft. of uplift in the '64 earthquake, that's exactly right. They also had to get boats over to Katalla, whereas if they came ashore on the other side of the river they could have just walked to town.

Also, do you have any ideas if/where there are records from the board of marine inspectors in Seattle, in 1910? I'll check with maritime history folks down there, going to be in the area around Xmas and would like to find whatever I can while I'm there.

--gabe

**Sunday, December 14, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Gabriel Scott

O.K.--The "moustrap" is the outside beach of Egg Island--west of Egg Island channel, east of Strawberry channel. Both these channels are moving west, a couple hundred yards a year, so what used to be Egg Island, is now Egg Island channel.

Story I heard from a well-informed tender operator is the Cowboy and the Indian thought the Egg Island light was Cape Hinchinbrook--thought they were entering the sound but drove up on the beach. Oops. Story was they both wrecked, but your synopsis probably is right--people just remember the "Cowboy and Indian." They were never moved. Wave action very heavy there, and I guess they were more or less gone within a few months.

Some four or five years ago there was a snag in Egg Island channel, which some fishermen supposed might have resulted from the Indian's big loading booms and stuff.

Hope that helps,

Gabe

**Monday, December 15, 2003**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Dave:

Great stuff from my colleague in Cordova.....Mike

**Tuesday, January 6, 2004**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Hi Dave:

Today, I found one small article in the *Bellingham Herald* on the *Indian, Scout, Cowboy* incident. With this find, I'm officially calling the search for information closed.

I'll send you a copy of the *Herald* article.

Maybe this could turn into an article for a maritime journal like the *Sea Chest* in Seattle, but I'd have to come up with some pictures. Do you have any?

Let me know if for some reason you didn't get Gabe Scott's e-mail explanation of the "Mousetrap" and the *Scout's* present situation.

Cheers and Happy 2004,

Mike

**Wednesday, January 7, 2004**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

Mike:

I got the article and the email regarding the mousetrap. I wonder if the hull is still visible?

All my pictures are somewhere in the ocean as I lost everything when she sank. I sure wish I knew a way to contact those on board when we sank but I don't even remember their names.

Hey, thanks again for your efforts and PI work on this. I truly appreciate it.

Dave...

## **Wreck of the Indian: The Search for the Story Part II**

**Thursday, December 30, 2004**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie, Keuka College

Mike,

I believe your records are incomplete. I believe the ship "Indian" went down off the Alaska coast on September 12, 1977, but I don't see any record of it on this website. Did it go down off the BC coast? Thanks.

Mike McKenzie  
Keuka College  
315-279-5601

**Thursday, December 30, 2004**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Hi Mike:

You're right. I have it in my master Access database that has yet to be updated and reposted on the Web. When this happens there will be about 2,500 more records available online to search. Last year I was trying to run this wreck down for Dave Riggins in Oregon who was on the vessel when it grounded on Egg Island Sept. 7, 1977. Here's what I have in my database: "After spending 3 months on the lower Yukon River, The 170' Indian, an ex-Washington State ferry towing the 65' riverboat tender Cowboy, and following the 130' freezer ship Scout, beached on Egg Island S of Cordova in rough seas and heavy rain. The Cowboy managed to sever itself from the Indian's 500-ft tow chain after a helicopter from Kodiak dropped cable cutters. The shallow-draft Cowboy was able to come alongside the Indian without grounding, get the 9 men aboard, and take them to Cordova. Within hours, the pounding waves had opened up and gutted the Indian, and its entire \$2.5 million worth of salmon and gear were lost. The Indian became a landmark and a hazard to navigation on the Mousetrap."

The Mousetrap is the outside beach of Egg Island—west of Egg Island Channel and east of Strawberry Channel. Both of these channels are moving west a couple of hundred yards a year, so what used to be Egg Island is now Egg Island Channel. The Indian was never recovered or moved and was guessed to have been broken up within a few months. Four or five years ago there was a snag in Egg Island Channel which some fishermen supposed might have been the Indian's big loading booms.

I'm curious what your relationship is to the wreck. I can send you copies of the Cordova Times news articles and give you Riggins' e-mail if you want to contact him....

Cheers,

Mike

Michael Burwell  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Minerals Management Service (MMS)  
Alaska OCS Region

**Friday, December 31, 2004**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

Mike,

Wow. OK, here's my story. I was on the Indian that summer, having sailed up with her and worked on her all that summer, and missed the wreck only because I had flown home! I found out about the wreck this way: I was grocery shopping in Yakima, Washington in the spring of 1978, and I saw a guy wearing the shirt: "Where the heck is Alukanuk, Alaska." Well, since that's the very obscure place where the Indian spent the summer of 1977, I started talking to the guy, and he was actually on the bridge of the Cowboy when the Indian radioed back that she was sinking! So he--without any training as a mate, etc.--had to pilot the Cowboy back up to the Indian where, as the story mentions, the transfer of men took place as the two ships careened up and down. As I remember his story, this took place in the dark as well. Yes, I do believe I remember Dave, I think he was from Redmond, Oregon at the time, so please send me his email address.

A couple more things you'll like. The ship was owned by Schenk Bros. Seafoods out of Bellingham, and they advertised for crew members in all INLAND papers (Bend, Oregon Bulletin, etc.) because they knew that the low wages they paid and the high work requirements they had would probably be spurned by "westside" (experienced) guys out of Seattle, Portland, etc. As I remember, all the guys I remember on the ships were from East of the Cascades (or most of them). And as I heard the story, our captain had been drinking when the accident took place, which I remember didn't surprise me when I heard it. He WAS experienced, but known for a fondness for the bottle. It was hard work but I do remember playing a tackle football game on the grass delta plains of the Yukon against crew members from a boat from Everett. I spent most of that summer working on both the Indian (in the freezers and slime lines) and on the Cowboy, as a tender buying fish from the Eskimos.

I have some decent pictures back in Oregon of some of the guys on the ship, the ship, etc. So I would definitely appreciate any information you can send or mail me on the circumstances of the wreck. My mailing address is below (and that's enough to get stuff to me just fine).

Thanks for all your help in this! Have a great New Years,

Mike

Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion Keuka College Keuka Park, NY

**Friday, December 31, 2004**

e-mail from:

Mike McKenzie

PS. I got your point about the shifting channels, etc. but is it actually impossible to find any remnant of the wreck, or even know the exact location of the wreck today? (GPS, etc.). I know no private parties had GPS in those days but I assume the Coast Guard marked the location? Thanks, Mike

**Monday, January 3, 2005**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell

Mike:

As far as I can tell, unless a vessel is a spill or navigation hazard the Coast Guard doesn't really keep track of old wrecks. The Army Corps of Engineers gets involved if they find a wreck when dredging harbors or shipping lanes. You could contact my friend Gabe Scott in Cordova at [cascadia@alaska.com](mailto:cascadia@alaska.com) who got me the info. on the Mousetrap from local fishermen and see if he can help you get a location for it. Generally, fishermen are pretty closed mouthed about [net] "snag" locations.

You could also contact Sue Jorgensen at the Coast Guard Marine Safety Office in Juneau at [sjorgensen@cgalaska.uscg.mil](mailto:sjorgensen@cgalaska.uscg.mil) and see if she can help. Generally wrecks this old are not in their database.

If you find out anything let me know and I'll put it in my database...

--Mike

**Monday, January 3, 2005**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell

Mike:

The Cowboy & Indian narrative keeps getting better! I'll send you all the stuff I sent Dave and feel free to send me anything you have that would round out my

file. Somewhere in the search process I called Schenk's widow in Bellingham trying to figure find out the story of this wreck....

Below is what I put in my database for the Scout & the Cowboy:

For the Scout:

The 130' freezer ship Scout, beached on Egg Island S of Cordova in rough seas and heavy rain while leading the Indian, another freezer boat and the riverboat tender Cowboy that the Indian had in tow. The Indian grounded, as well, and broke up after its 9-man crew was taken off by the Cowboy. Nine days after grounding, the vessels Kushtika and Forty Mile from Cordova, the tugs Trojan from Whittier, and George S from Hoonah finally pulled the Scout free and saved its 300,000 lb salmon cargo. Earlier, Beaver pilot, Tom Madsen, managed to drop a 340-lb tow cable to the Scout's crew on a 15-ft by 10-ft area on the stern in 60 mph winds.

For the Cowboy:

The riverboat tender Cowboy escaped grounding after it managed to sever itself from the tow chain of the freezer ship Indian that had grounded in high seas and heavy rain on Egg Island. The Cowboy's crew managed to cut the Indian's 500-ft tow chain after a helicopter from Kodiak dropped cable cutters. It was able to pull alongside the Indian and rescue all 9 men aboard and take them safely to Cordova. Another freezer ship in the convoy, the Scout, also grounded on Egg Island but was later successfully pulled off.

Dave really wanted to get in touch with other crew members, so I think you'll really make his New Year brighter.

**Monday, January 3, 2005**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell

Dave: Happy New Year 2005! See E-mail from Michael McKenzie below:

--Mike Burwell

-----Original Message-----

From: Michael McKenzie [mailto:MMCKENZI@mail.keuka.edu]

Sent: Friday, December 31, 2004 8:34 AM

To: Burwell, Michael

Cc: Allison McKenzie

Subject: RE: Missing Shipwreck

Mike,

Wow. OK, here's my story. I was on the Indian that summer, having sailed up with her and worked on her all that summer, and missed the wreck only because I had flown home! I found out about the wreck this way: I was grocery shopping in Yakima, Washington in the spring of 1978, and I saw a guy wearing the shirt: "Where the heck is Alukanuk, Alaska." Well, since that's the very obscure place where the Indian spent the summer of 1977, I started talking to the guy, and he was actually on the bridge of the Cowboy when the Indian radioed back that she was sinking! So he--without any training as a mate, etc.--had to pilot the Cowboy back up to the Indian where, as the story mentions, the transfer of men took place as the two ships careened up and down. As I remember his story, this took place in the dark as well. Yes, I do believe I remember Dave, I think he was from Redmond, Oregon at the time, so please send me his email address.

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I have some decent pictures back in Oregon of some of the guys on the ship, the ship, etc. So I would definitely appreciate any information you can send or mail me on the circumstances of the wreck. My mailing address is below (and that's enough to get stuff to me just fine).

Thanks for all your help in this! Have a great New Years,

Mike  
Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

**Monday, January 3, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

One of the funny things about this is that both Schenk brothers did not like to sail (and the one who came up, flew). I emailed Dave, and, like I told him, as I recall, they worked us about 25 hours a day. (It wasn't the work we minded it was the fact that we were on salary, with no incentive for working our butts off!!). Thanks for all this, Mike.

**Monday, January 3, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

Thanks, Mike. BTW, do you know what happened to the Cowboy? It was my understanding that it ended up near/at La Conner, Washington. I really liked that ship. There were three of us on that ship during most of the summer, another hand and the captain (the one who later piloted the Indian to disaster). But it sure didn't draw much, and it was clean.

Small world, Rochester is only about an hour away. BBTW, I attended U of Alaska--Fairbanks for a while in the late 1970s.

Mike  
Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

**Monday, January 3, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Mike: From  
[http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/landings/cg\\_vessel2.html](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/landings/cg_vessel2.html) it looks like and outfit in Kodiak owns the Cowboy....Mike

Data found in current database. Vessel Name: COWBOY USCG Doc. No.: 573529  
Vessel Service: COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL IMO Number: \* Trade Indicator: Coastwise Unrestricted, Fishery, Registry Call Sign: WYL4152 Hull Material: STEEL Hull Number: 123 Shipyard and Address: HOLZ TRAILER CO \* Year Built: 1976  
Hullyard and Address: \*  
BELLINGHAM WA Length (ft.): 58.2  
Hailing Port: KODIAK Hull Depth (ft.): 5  
Owner: FIELDS & SONS INC  
2530 SPRUCE CAPE RD PO BOX 1691  
KODIAK, AK 99615 Hull Breadth (ft.): 24 Gross Tonnage: 73 Net Tonnage: 63  
Documentation Issuance Date: November 02, 2004 Documentation Expiration Date: November 30, 2005

Previous Vessel Names: No Vessel Name Changes Previous Vessel Owners: FIELDS AND SONS INC

**Tuesday, January 4, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Dave Riggins

This is awesome. Thanks so much...Happy New Year to you as well.

**Monday, January 31, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

Hi Mike,

I've exchanged several neat emails with Dave, re: our experiences on the Indian. Did you get a chance to copy any of the materials on the Indian that you had? My mailing address is that which follows (there's not much to Keuka Park and mail sent to me with that address works fine).  
Thanks. Mike

Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

**Tuesday, February 1, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

I guess I said I'd send it and then never did. I'll get it off to you soon....Mike

**Tuesday, February 15, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Hi Mike:

I copied pretty much everything intelligible in my file on the *Indian*—e-mails, xeroxes, tables on the ships' ownership history. I'll send it off today. Any more nuggets on the story from your discourse with Dave R.?

Cheers,

Mike

**Tuesday, February 15, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

Not really. He is very interested in getting copies of my pictures, and I'm glad to comply, but they're all in my folks' house in Oregon so it will likely be this summer before I can make copies. I only wish I had taken more, and with a better camera! Thanks for these copies, Mike.  
Best, Mike

**Saturday, February 19, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

Mike, Just got the materials yesterday--thanks much for this! Brings back a lot of memories....! I'm also glad that Dave will finally get some pictures....Mike

Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

## **Wreck of the Indian: The Search for the Story Part III**

**Thursday, October 19, 2006**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

Hi Mike,

I am one of the crewman of the Indian, that ship we've talked about that went down in 1977. I was researching another Pacific wreck and happened across the Alaska NOAA shipwreck site but still didn't see the Indian listed. With all my memories now stirred up, I was surprised--did I miss it? Thanks,

Mike  
Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

**Thursday, October 19, 2005**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Attached is what's in the database.....

Alaska Shipwrecks Database  
Detailed Wreck Account

<b>Vessel:</b>	Indian	<b>Registration</b>	
<b>Vessel Type:</b>	Freezer boat	<b>Length/Tons:</b>	170'
<b>Where Lost:</b>	On the "Mousetrap," Egg Island, S of Cordova.	<b>Date Built:</b>	1932
<b>Where Built:</b>		<b>Date of Wreck:</b>	9/7/1977
<b>Master:</b>		<b>Lth/Brdth/Dth</b>	
<b>Owner:</b>		<b>Hull Type:</b>	Steel
<b>Home Port:</b>		<b>Number of Crew:</b>	9
<b>Destination:</b>	Bellingham, WA	<b>Number of Passengers:</b>	0
<b>Cargo Type:</b>	Salmon	<b>Number Lost:</b>	0

**Vessel Value:**  
**Vessel**  
**Last Port:**  
**Cargo**

**Cargo Weight:** 750,000 lb  
**Cargo Value:** \$2.5 million

**Note:** No latitude/longitude coordinates established

**Cause of Wreck:** After spending 3 months on the lower Yukon River, The 170' Indian, an ex-Washington State ferry towing the 65' riverboat tender Cowboy, and following the 130' freezer ship Scout, beached on Egg Island S of Cordova in rough seas and heavy rain. The Cowboy managed to sever itself from the Indian's 500-ft tow chain after a helicopter from Kodiak dropped cable cutters. The shallow-draft Cowboy was able to come alongside the Indian without grounding, get the 9 men aboard, and take them to Cordova. Within hours, the pounding waves had opened up and gutted the Indian, and its entire \$2.5 million worth of salmon and gear were lost. The Indian became a landmark and a hazard to navigation on the Mousetrap.

**Sources:** Cordova Times 9/15/1977

**Photo(s):**

Tuesday, October 31, 2006

Page 1 of 1

**Tuesday, October 31, 2005**

e-mail from:

Mike Burwell

Hi Mike:

I am doing quality control on my entire database and I am up to WWII. When I get through the whole thing (by the end of the year?) I will repost it to the Web and the Indian will be on it. Until then, you are stuck with the same old 1,200 wrecks that have been on the Web for years.

Ciao,

Mike

Michael Burwell  
Sociocultural Specialist  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Minerals Management Service (MMS)

**Tuesday, October 31, 2005**

e-mail from:

Mike McKenzie

I understand. Thanks,

Mike  
Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

## **Wreck of the Indian: The Search for the Story Part IV**

**Tuesday, April 1, 2008**

e-mail from:  
Mike McKenzie

Hi Mike,

I'm one of the crew of the Indian, the ship that sank in September, 1977. Perhaps you remember my contacting you and getting ahold of the other crewmember? Anyway, I noticed that the Indian is still not listed, and I'd like to use it as part of a clue for a research contest I run for my students each semester. Any chance that it can be added?

Thanks,

Mike  
Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

**Monday, April 7, 2008**

e-mail from:  
Mike Burwell

Mike:

Mike Burwell here. I have the same old sad story about quality control lagging behind. This shipwreck project always comes after writing environmental impact statements, etc. I have my quality control up to 1940 but that doesn't help folks like you who want new data on the site. I am seeing if I can attach a special link for the Indian story right to the Shipwreck home page. I'll know tomorrow.....

Mike Burwell

**This E-mail Narrative posted to the Net in April 2008**